



# ZEN SCHOOLS

Mindful Schools

The world needs mindfulness; and in this fast paced, stressed and distracted world, the children of today probably need it more than any previous generation.

Prof Craig Hassed

## Guidance for Practitioners



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## About this resource

Zen Schools is a resource pack which has been compiled by educational psychologists in consultation with the education outreach service. The pack is intended to be used by teaching staff to support a mindfulness approach in their practice. This document contains information on mindfulness and a compilation of activities to be used by practitioners with children and young people, either in the classroom, mindfulness/nurture groups or even when undertaking some work with individuals. Activities for adults are also available.

There's a readiness checklist that professionals might find useful and as part of this approach to mindfulness practitioners will also be invited to attend a training session and encouraged to involve parents and carers in the use of mindfulness.

This pack can be used by primary and secondary (S1) schools to help promote emotion regulation, mental health, attention, memory and learning. The gains from mindfulness are in addition to other wellbeing interventions, therefore, this package will be more effective when added to a nurturing approach and strong focus on positive relationships.

## Introduction

A key part of the Curriculum for Excellence is Health and Wellbeing which emphasises the need to ensure that children and young people develop the knowledge and understanding, skills, capabilities and attributes which they need for mental, emotional, social and physical wellbeing now and in the future.

The *National Improvement Framework* sets out clear priorities to deliver excellence and equity, including: closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged children and young people and improving children and young people's health and wellbeing.

In this context, Mindfulness emerges as a practice that can help to promote pupils learning and wellbeing. The research evidence suggests that practicing mindfulness strengthens areas of the brain that control executive function consequently leading to better attention, memory, regulation of emotions and self-awareness.

Therefore, this document aims to provide teachers who wish to implement a mindfulness based approach to their learning environment, a clear and concise way of doing it.

## What is mindfulness?

*Mindfulness is the practice of focusing awareness by paying attention to the present moment with openness, curiosity and without judgement*

(Jon Kabat-Zinn)

Mindfulness is a state – an awareness and a mindset that we carry through life. But this state can be developed, or enhanced through activities. These activities are often also referred to as “meditation” or as “mindfulness practice”. Mindfulness practice can be divided into **formal** and **informal** practice.

**Formal practice** is mindfulness meditation where you sit, usually with the eyes closed, and focus attention on one thing, usually either your breathing or the sensations experienced within your body.

With **informal practice** you bring the same kind of improved attention that you might get from formal practice to everyday situations. This involves directing your full and non-judgemental attention to the activity you’re undertaking at a particular moment – it might be taking a shower, getting dressed, chatting with a friend or teaching. Reading is a great example of how we can benefit from informal mindfulness practice – where we need our full attention to really comprehend the words on the page, rather than being distracted or lost in other thoughts and not actually aware of what we are reading.

The **informal practice** can be built upon the following 6 principles:

**Awareness** – being aware of whatever you are experiencing in the present moment as you go through your daily life. What do you feel in your body? What are you seeing, hearing, doing - right now?

**Curiosity** - the desire to learn or know about anything. When you’re curious, problem solving becomes easier because you see more options, paths, and ways of solving a

problem than your non-curious counterparts. You question more; you gather more opinions; you don't stop at the first solution – which can lead to greater possibilities.

**Kindness (to self and others)** - deal gently, kindly, and patiently with yourself and others. Rather than judging, or condemning, really listen and try to understand your own and other people's experiences. Kindness is about allowing yourself to connect and empathize with your own and others' experiences.

**Acceptance** - A willingness to see things the way they are. By fully accepting what each moment offers, we are able to experience life much more completely. By accepting things as they are we don't try to force or change reality to fit our beliefs.

**Gratitude** - The practice of gratitude sharpens our attention for the good and the positive in our lives, which helps us appreciate things that we tend to take for granted.

**Resilience** – the ability to properly adapt to stress and adversity.

Please note that mindfulness is not a religious or spiritual practice. Because mindfulness is an evidence based attention training and awareness technique that is not intended to explore religious beliefs or attitudes, it neither conflicts nor overlaps with any spiritual practice or religion.

## **Benefits of mindfulness**

Mindfulness offers a range of benefits to support pupil's readiness and engagement with learning. It is an effective tool for settling and focusing children at the beginning of any classroom activity, and is also a practice that **strengthens** and **develops** important cognitive skills related to learning, such as **attention**, **concentration** and **memory**.

Mindfulness can facilitate the development of important social and emotional skills through each developmental stage of a pupil's life. It provides a foundational awareness and understanding of thoughts, emotions and behaviours and how to self-regulate. It also **reduces emotional reactivity**, **behavioural issues**, **anxiety** and **depression**.

Mindfulness also provides a calmer and more peaceful environment for both staff and pupils in the school.

According to a meta-analysis<sup>1</sup> of more than 70 studies comparing more than 6,000 school aged young people, those who practised mindfulness showed:

- Better emotion and behaviour regulation than 62% of those who didn't practice mindfulness.
- Better academic performance than 66% of those who didn't practice mindfulness.
- Better social skills than 64% of those who didn't practice mindfulness.
- Lower depression and anxiety scores than 66% of those who didn't practice mindfulness.

Similarly, teachers who practise mindfulness and who employ mindfulness in their classrooms are:

- Less stressed.
- Sleep better.
- Report fewer bad moods.
- Report more workplace satisfaction than those who don't.
- More caring and effective in the classroom, experiencing improved relationships with students.

**It's important to note that it's unlikely to see immediate improvements from mindfulness practice. Gains are obtained from practising a skill that is slowly developed.**

## Mindful Schools

A whole school approach to mindfulness encompasses the integration of mindfulness through the curriculum, professional development, leadership practice and across the learning environment.

Experience within schools that have implemented a mindfulness programme suggest that teacher engagement with mindfulness is a strong predictor of the success of the program with their classroom students. Furthermore, mindfulness programmes in

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<sup>1</sup> Klingbeil, D. A., Renshaw, T. L., Willenbrink, J. B., Copek, R. A., Chan, K. T., Haddock, A., ... & Clifton, J. (2017). Mindfulness-based interventions with youth: A comprehensive meta-analysis of group-design studies. *Journal of school psychology, 63*, 77-103.

schools are often even more successful if a principal teacher and/or the senior management team is engaged and supportive. Modelling is an important part of teaching mindfulness to children and young people and therefore teacher engagement with mindfulness is an important part of modelling this behaviour in the classroom and throughout the school community.

It's also important that everybody in the school has at least a basic understanding of mindfulness in order to promote its use throughout the learning community. Practitioners should also be encouraged, not forced, to have their own mindfulness practice. Teachers might find that with personal practice they might see similar benefits as the students.

In order to maximise the benefits of mindfulness, a whole school approach to embedding mindfulness practices is recommended for sustainable impact. Many schools have found that engaging the whole school community in implementing and maintaining their mindfulness programme results in the biggest impact. We therefore encourage senior management team to buy-in to ensure that mindfulness is part of the school ethos and the wider Curriculum for Excellence approach to Health and Wellbeing. We also encourage schools to involve parents and carers in this approach by sharing with them information on mindfulness and inviting them to a taster session<sup>2</sup>.

## Implementing a Mindfulness Practice

It is suggested by Kevin Hawkins that there are three aspects of Mindfulness in Education:

- **Be Mindful** – The basis for all of our work in this area is *being mindful*.
- **Teach mindfully** – The heightened awareness that arises from developing a mindfulness practice will often impact the way we are in the classroom, enabling us to teach more mindfully.
- **Teach mindfulness** – Once we have this foundation, we may choose to train to *teach mindfulness* to others.

Although teachers would probably feel more comfortable if they were highly experienced in mindfulness before they teach it, research suggests that there's little

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<sup>2</sup> PowerPoint presentation attached to this document.

to no relationship between teacher experience and outcomes. However, those who have or are willing to have their own mindfulness practice will be best placed to deliver it as well as to experience its benefits. The activities and apps suggested in this document should be enough to get teachers started in the use of a mindfulness-based approach with children and young people.

Regardless, some professionals may feel they want to expand their knowledge/practice and undertaking a training course could be a natural follow-up.

The use of this resource is meant to be flexible and adjustable to the school's needs. It's targeted at primary and early secondary (S1) pupils and can be used with a whole class or as a focused intervention for Nurture Groups.

It is divided into 6 themes or principles which have been stated before and are outlined in Table 1. Each theme will be taught individually bringing practitioners to a total of 6 lessons. It is estimated that most of the lessons could last between 20 to 30 minutes but this would be dependent on the depth of the discussion and children's engagement in the activities.

Each lesson comes with a PowerPoint presentation and different activities to better explain the different mindfulness themes/principles to children. The activities are outlined in the Resources section of this guidance alongside other ones for consolidation or follow up.

Cognitive and neuroscientific studies indicate that regular practice is vital for developing any skill, and mindfulness is no different. More practice leads to better outcomes, so, for a more positive effect, mindfulness practices should be done more than once a week.

Therefore, lessons should be delivered weekly or fortnightly but practitioners are encouraged to promote regular practices with their pupils to better develop skills.

**Many educators will find that first thing in the morning, after lunch break or before exams or tests can be good times to integrate a regular mindfulness practice.**

## Helpful tips

### Avoid conflict with other activities

It's important to schedule mindfulness lessons and regular sessions at times during the day when they don't conflict with other activities that students either really enjoy or tend not to like all that much. Try not to let mindfulness be used as a way of "getting out of" another activity, or be seen as an inconvenience.

### A quiet location with few distractions

The best location for mindfulness sessions is a quiet classroom with relatively few distractions. It's best if other students can't see into the room. It is worth noting that some noise outside or nearby won't matter – mindfulness can involve noticing distracting noise and returning attention to the practice.

### In the morning and after lunch

First thing in the morning and immediately after lunch are good options for regular mindfulness sessions. **Whatever time you choose, consistency of time and place is important to avoid confusion.**

School experience suggests that students benefit from practising a mindfulness exercise when they return from a busy and often overstimulating lunch break. A brief mindfulness exercise at this time can help develop a sense of calm, focus and letting go of any negative experiences they may have had during the break.

### Have your own practice

Teachers who practice mindfulness themselves are more effective at teaching mindfulness. You can find some activities suitable for adults in the Resources section.

### Debrief

Spend some time at the end of the mindfulness sessions to discuss pupil's experiences and to debrief on any emotions that may have been experienced.

### Mindfulness is not for everybody

Pupils who do not wish to engage with the practice can opt-out by simply sitting quietly during the practice and should be discouraged from distracting others.

### Trauma and Adversity

Teachers or even parents might be concerned that mindfulness may do harm to children and young people. Review of the literature show no cases of harm have been reported from mindfulness in schools. Most reports of adverse events are from intensive and extended practice, which is very different to the purpose of the practice outlined in this document (such as lengthy multiple day silent retreats).

Mindfulness is simply attention and acceptance training. As such, if a difficult issue arises for a pupil, the issue will have been there already.

The act of training attention may highlight that issue, but the mindfulness practice is not the cause of it.

If pupils have experienced trauma or adversity, mindfulness practise may reduce the distractions that they usually employ to avoid or manage their symptoms.

As such, it is important to monitor pupils who are known to have a trauma history. If you do notice a child or young person is experiencing heightened emotional distress following mindfulness practise it's important to:

1. Try and find a private opportunity to discuss what's occurred with them.
2. Allow the pupils to express their feelings with an attitude of non-judgemental acceptance, so they are able to communicate their needs as openly as possible.
3. Debrief with the pupil and explain that sometimes practicing paying attention to the way we feel can cause us to become more aware of uncomfortable feelings, and this is a normal experience.
4. If after having done this you still have concerns, consult with the Educational Psychology Service.

## **Evaluating the impact of Zen Schools**

A thorough evaluation of impact in areas such as health and wellbeing can be complex and challenging as the evidence gathered can be very subjective. Supporting children

to reflect on and evaluate their experiences and learning should be done at the end of every lesson by asking them 'what they've learnt today'. The Wellbeing indicators from Getting it Right for Every Child can also be used by teachers to explore the impact of Zen Schools on children.

A reflective questionnaire for children, their parents and teachers is also available to be used at the end of the implementation of this programme to provide information on how useful the lessons and the materials were and to inform future adaptations, if needed.

### **Methods to support evaluation of impact**

#### Observation

Staff may observe changes in the confidence, behaviour, engagement and coping strategies of children as they develop the programme with their class. This information can be recorded as evidence of the impact of the programme on children.

#### Discussion

Discussions between staff or with parents can elicit helpful information on whether children have developed new coping strategies or are demonstrating any specific skill learned on the lessons.

#### Post-evaluation measures

Questionnaires for children, parents and staff are available to use at the end of the programme to support evaluation of impact of the resource.

#### Practitioner Enquiry

Practitioner Enquiry can also be used to explore impact. Some examples of questions which could be answered through practitioner enquiry might include:

Children are observed undertaking actions which show kindness and gratitude.

Children use the mindfulness principles to promote their wellbeing.

## Resources

The following pages contain materials practitioners will find helpful to implement a mindful practice in their settings:

- Readiness checklist
- Activities for Practitioners
- Activities for Children and Young People
- Useful Links
- Evaluation questionnaires
- Taster Session for Parents (attached PowerPoint presentation)
- Teaching Mindfulness - 6 lessons (attached PowerPoint presentation)
- Twilight for Teachers (attached PowerPoint presentation)
- Leaflet
- Poster

## Readiness Checklist<sup>3</sup>

Please circle **YES** or **NO**.

1. Our Senior Management Team (SMT) are willing to fully support and model the implementation of mindfulness based approaches. 

YES	NO
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2. Mindfulness based approaches will be part of our school improvement plan. 

YES	NO
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3. I know about the general aims of mindfulness based approaches. 

YES	NO
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4. I know about how it can be used in school settings. 

YES	NO
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5. I know that mindfulness based approaches can be used in a range of different ways. 

YES	NO
-----	----
  
6. I have had opportunities to observe mindfulness based approaches being used in schools. 

YES	NO
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7. I am confident I have the time, skills and resources to implement mindfulness based approaches effectively. 

YES	NO
-----	----
  
8. I think mindfulness based approaches suits the needs of our school. 

YES	NO
-----	----
  
9. I feel supported by my management and know the time and resources will be available for me to do this well. 

YES	NO
-----	----
  
10. We are able to allocate time for all staff to receive training in mindfulness before we start using the resource. 

YES	NO
-----	----
  
11. I agree that it is important and beneficial to inform parents/carers and involve them in mindfulness based approaches, and we will seek innovative ways of doing this. 

YES	NO
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12. We have an area within the school to display/pass on information about mindfulness based approaches to parents/carers, for example, a notice board, leaflet or regular newsletter. 

YES	NO
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<sup>3</sup> Readiness checklist to be completed after training session for school staff

13. I know that evaluation is crucial and I will complete all evaluation required.

YES	NO
-----	----

14. I need more information before I can take forward mindfulness based approaches.

YES	NO
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## Mindfulness Activities for Practitioners

**Practitioners are encouraged to have their own mindfulness practice, therefore, the following activities can be used as a starting point to develop this practice. We encourage staff to take some time as a group to do the activities, but they can easily also be done individually.**

### ***Formal Practice***

A formal meditation practice is really the bedrock of developing mindfulness. Three suggested approaches to this are outlined below.

1. Sitting meditation
2. The Bodyscan
3. Mindful Walking (Hawkins, 2017)

### Sitting meditation

- Sitting well, with both feet flat on the floor, small of the back away from the edge of the back of the chair, try to have a sense of being rooted through the feet to the floor and supported in the chair. Check the shoulders are down, back and relaxed, not hunched. Tuck in the chin slightly and allow the head to feel supported by the spine, with an upward lift from the top of the head towards the ceiling.
- When you're ready to start you can gently close your eyes if that feels comfortable or just lower the gaze to a metre or so in front on the floor, softening the eyes.
- You can either use a timer and build up the time gradually or use a guided meditation at least to start with. Establish an anchor – body, sounds or breath and keep coming back to this sensory anchor when you notice that the mind has wandered, which it will!
- Be kind to yourself when you don't manage your expectations. Building self-compassion is a key element of this work.
- Consider using an App to guide you.

## The Bodyscan

- This can be done sitting or lying down.
- The main aim of the bodyscan is to aim and sustain your attention on various parts of the body. Participants follow a guided visualisation tour of the body that opens up mind-body connections.

Consider using a guided meditation practice from an audio track of a course book or an online resource/app (e.g. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t2UFYXYQHjA>)

## Mindful Walking

- This is ultimately a walking meditation where participants walk slowly and mindfully, bringing attention into the body and the present moment.
- Be aware of the feeling of touching the ground with the soles of the feet.
- One step at a time, arriving fully with each step.
- When thoughts arise, notice, gently bring the mind back to step and breath.
- Coordinate breath and step (e.g., two for in-breath, three for out-breath)
- There are guided meditations available to further develop awareness of this.

## ***Informal Practice***

Bringing more mindful attention into our day is known as informal practice. There are many different ways this can be done to help people remember to come out of autopilot or overthinking and back to the present moment.

**Many of the activities which are suggested to the pupils are also applicable to adults but below are a few more ideas to help bring mindfulness into practitioners' daily life.**

## Act of Kindness



### **Instructions:**

Today, keep in mind the following important question: What is one small kindness I can offer in the next sixty seconds? Whenever the question arises in your mind, go into action. Send a kind email, smile at the next person you meet, or give someone a genuine compliment. If you don't interact with anyone today, extend a kindness to yourself, whether an affirmation or self-acknowledgement. Don't waste any potential sixty-second kindness.

(From One Minute Mindfulness, Donald Altman, 2011)



## Gratitude for the day

### **Instructions:**

Here is a gratitude practice that can have an immediate impact on your life. Every three or four days, look back over that time period and write down three to five things that happened at home [or at work] for which you are grateful. This could be appreciation for a kind act someone did for you or for any of the little things in your life – that comfortable chair, the flavour of a particular food, the book you are reading, the music you love, the hot water in your shower. (You are not limited to five items.) Do this for a four-week period to see how it affects your life. You might even track how gratitude impacts your mood, your sleep, how you eat, exercise, and interact with others.

(From One Minute Mindfulness, Donald Altman, 2011)

## Tree in a Storm



### Instructions:

- Find a comfortable, relaxed, stable sitting or lying position.
- Become aware of the in- and out-breath. No need to change the breath, just be aware of it.
- Put your hands on your belly, aware of it rising and falling. Become aware of the length of each breath.
- Aware of difficult feelings in mind or body, e.g., physical pain, anger, sadness. Breathe with it, say hello to it, and embrace it.
- You are a tree – your belly is the trunk, your arms are the branches. Your strong feeling is like the storm making your branches sway. Become aware of your belly – become stable and rooted.
- Come back to your breath and stay with the rising and falling of the belly:  
Breathing in, I calm this strong feeling.  
Breathing out, I can even smile to this strong feeling.
- Though the emotions are still present, stay with your breath. Soon the storm will pass.

(From Happy Teachers Change the World, Thich Nhat Hanh and Katherine Weare, 2017)

## Soothe with Music



### Instructions:

- Identify the kind of music that makes you feel calm, upbeat, relaxed, joyful, or peaceful. Music is very personal, and there's a wide variety of music you can use – from classical to rock. For a serene and meditative state, consider spiritual songs such as *Amazing Grace*, *Somewhere Over the Rainbow*, and *Ave Maria*.
- For one minute or longer, play your favourite soothing music. If you don't have the music with you, simply sing the lyrics out loud or "in your head."
- After a minute of hearing the music, make a note of how you feel. Become aware of body sensations, as well as slight shifts in mood or thought patterns. Does your breath become slower, fuller? Do your muscles feel relaxed? Are you reminded of any places or images that soothe you?
- Keep a log of music to compare various tunes and explore the different feelings they elicit.
- After you know which songs produce feelings of well-being, you may want to create an uplifting, energising playlist, as well as a relaxing, soothing playlist.

Use music to quickly induce feelings of calm and peace – especially when transitioning from work to home, or after any stressful or demanding situation.

(From 101 Mindful ways to Build Resilience, Donald Altman, 2016)

## Mindfulness Activities for Children

The mindfulness principles stated in this resource pack will be taught to children in 6 separate lessons. Each lesson has suggested activities that practitioners will find in the table below alongside a few more for consolidation or follow-up.

**Table 1**

<b>Mindfulness Principle</b>	<b>Suggested activities</b>
Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Mindful Seeing</li><li>• Rainbow Walk</li><li>• Mindful Colouring</li></ul>
Curiosity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Mindful Eating</li><li>• Sounds in the room</li><li>• Mirror of Erised</li></ul>
Kindness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Wishing upon a star</li><li>• Blow the unkindness away</li><li>• Random Acts of Kindness / Kindness Superstars</li></ul>
Acceptance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Finger Labyrinths</li><li>• Glitter Bottles</li><li>• Emotions Board</li><li>• Flower breathing</li></ul>
Gratitude	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Gratitude Jar</li><li>• Expecto Patronum</li><li>• Journaling</li><li>• Gratitude letter</li></ul>
Resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Finding positivity</li><li>• Ice-cube exercise</li><li>• Read 'The places you'll go' by Dr Seuss</li><li>• The Stretch Zone</li></ul>

**Activity:** Mindful Seeing

**Aim:** Awareness

**Best for:** Children age 8+

**Approximate time:** 5 min

**Materials Required:** Outdoor space



**Instructions:**

1. Find a comfortable space outdoors.
2. Ask children to sit quietly and look at everything there is to see. Ask them to notice the colours, the patterns, the shapes, the movements.
3. They should try and see the world from the perspective of someone unfamiliar with these sights.
4. If you notice children becoming distracted gently remind them to just be aware of the world around them.
5. After 5 min ask them what they've noticed. (The colour of the bird, the shape of the tree, the flower moving with the breeze, etc.)

**Activity:** Rainbow walk

**Aim:** Awareness

**Best for:** Children age 5+

**Approximate time:** 20 min

**Materials Required:** None



### **Instructions:**

1. This is a simple activity that will teach the child to be mindful of his or her surroundings. Before you begin, have a quick discussion to remind them of the colours of a rainbow (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet).
2. Then, step outside.
3. Throughout the walk, ask the children to find something to represent each colour of the rainbow. They can take a small notebook with them to jot down their answers, or can simply take note of them in their mind.
4. Depending on the surroundings, some colours will be more difficult to locate than others; this is part of the fun! Try to keep walking until they've found an example of every colour.
5. Afterwards, ask how it felt to be mindful of the surroundings. Was it fun? Was it calming?

Adapted from [www.blissfullkids.com](http://www.blissfullkids.com)

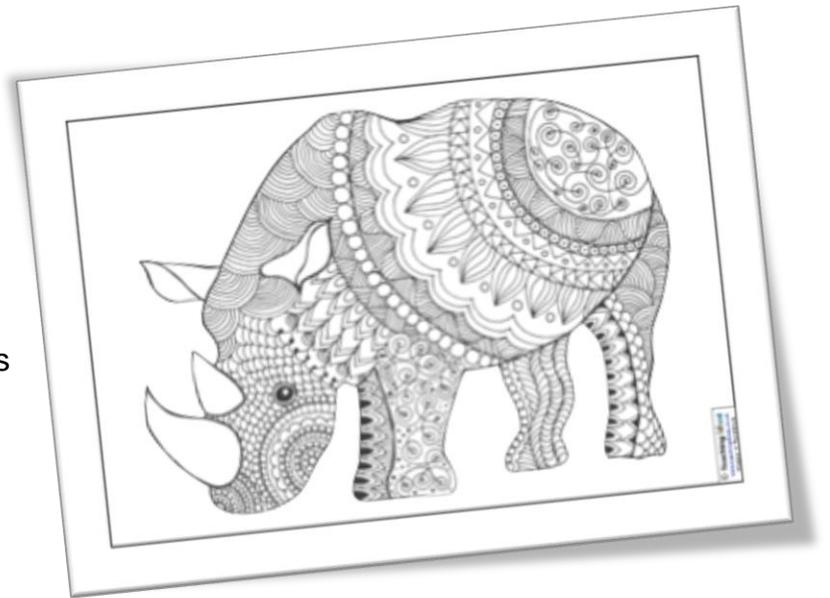
**Activity:** Mindful Colouring

**Aim:** Awareness

**Best for:** Children age 5+

**Approximate time:** 15min

**Materials Required:** Colouring sheets



**Instructions:**

- Let children colour the printouts as a calm way to start each day... or each afternoon after a busy lunchtime!
- Ask kids to let go of their thoughts and just be aware of the present moment by colouring the printouts using different colours or different shades of one colour.
- Have the resources available as an activity for children who have finished other activities early.

**Free Printable Sheets:**

- Teaching Ideas - <https://www.teachingideas.co.uk/2d-art/mindfulness-colouring-images-animals>

**Activity:** Mindful Eating

**Aim:** Curiosity

**Best for:** Children aged 5+

**Approximate time:** 10 minutes

**Materials Required:** Maltesers, computer, sound, projector.



**Instructions:**

The mindful eating meditation is a great way to practice mindfulness through the process of eating. You will need to verbally guide the children through this meditation.

1. At first, watch this YouTube clip with kids:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=guXTS1YFf-0> to model the process and show the child exactly what do.

2. Then, tell the child to pick up their malteser and look at it. Ask them to make a silent observation about its size and texture.
3. Direct them to feel the malteser between their fingers. Is it soft or hard? What does the weight of the malteser feel like in their palm?
4. Have them bring the malteser to their nose. Does its smell remind them of anything? How does it smell different from other foods?
5. Ask them to bring the malteser close to their ear and to squish it gently. Is there a sound to be heard?
6. Next, tell them to put the malteser on their tongue...but tell them not to take a bite just yet! Does the texture feel different when it's in their mouth compared to when they've held it in their hand? Is there more than one flavour?
7. Ask them to bite into the malteser, and to pay attention to the sound it makes (if you're doing this in a group, **ask all children to bite into their maltesers at the same time**, they tend to find the noise it makes funny).
8. Finally, tell them to swallow the malteser. Ask them to determine what flavours are left lingering in their mouth.

Adapted from 60 Mindfulness Minutes, The Nurture Group Network



**Activity:** Mirror of Erised

**Aim:** Curiosity

**Best for:** Children age 10+

**Approximate time:** 10/15 minutes

**Materials Required:** Mirror, Post-it notes



**Instructions:**

1. The Mirror of Erised is a special mirror featured on the Harry Potter series, which reflects the deepest desires of those who look at it.
2. Ask children to look into a mirror and to think about their deepest desires.
3. Ask them to write on a post-it note what came out of this exercise and to think about one thing that they can do to see this desire come true.

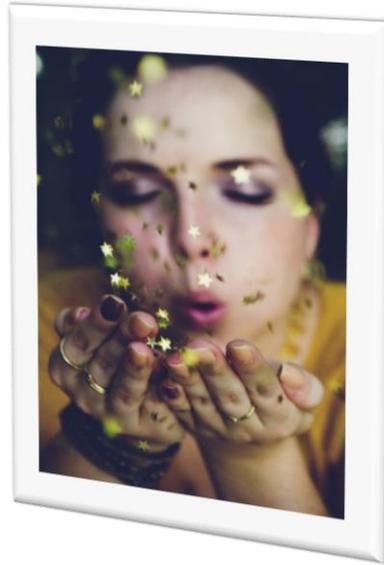
**Activity:** Wishing upon a star

**Aim:** Kindness

**Best for:** Children age 5+

**Approximate time:** 10 min

**Materials Required:** Post-It notes



**Instructions:**

1. Imagine you could see a falling star and you get to make two wishes. One for yourself and another one for someone you care about.
2. Write them down on a piece of paper and think of ways of making this wish come true.
3. Discuss it with the class and ask for others opinion on how to make the wishes come true.
4. Pay attention to how it feels to wish these kind things for yourself and others.

**Activity:** Blow the unkindness away

**Aim:** Kindness

**Best for:** Children age 5+

**Approximate time:** 5 min

**Materials Required:** Bubbles



**Instructions:**

1. Ask children to think about unkind thoughts or unhelpful thoughts they might have.
2. Ask them to blow them into bubbles and watch them drift away.

**Activity:** Random acts of kindness

**Aim:** Kindness

**Best for:** Children age 5+

**Approximate time:** 10min

**Materials Required:** None



**Instructions:**

1. Ask children to think about how they can be kind today.
2. Give examples: Smile to someone, give a compliment, open a door, etc.
3. Ask children to commit to one act of kindness today.

**Activity:** Kindness Superstars

**Aim:** Kindness

**Best for:** Children age 8+

**Approximate time:** 10min

**Materials Required:** None



**Instructions:**

1. Buddy children up (change partners every week or every other week): trust them to be in charge of being kind to each other.

Adapted from <https://www.edutopia.org/blog/kindness-lesson-plan-rebecca-alber>

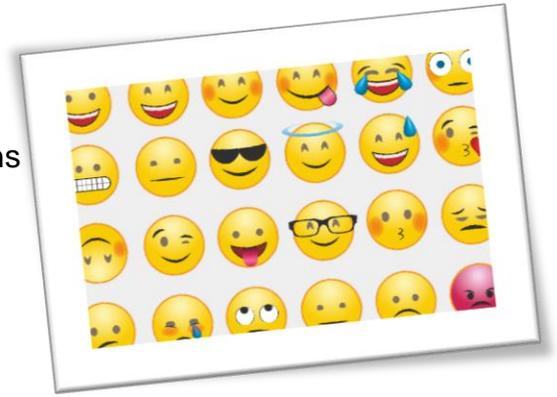
**Activity:** Emotions Board

**Aim:** Acceptance and awareness of feelings and emotions

**Best for:** Children age 5+

**Approximate time:** 20min

**Materials Required:** Paper, pencil and/or colours



### Instructions:

1. Ask children to close their eyes and think about how they are feeling. You might need to offer some words to give them ideas (happy, disappointed, silly, scared, angry, etc.).
2. Once they've done the thinking bit, ask them to draw how they are feeling.
3. Invite children to name their emotions and write the word on the picture (if they are comfortable with it).
4. Display the drawings on an Emotions Board on the wall.

Adapted from <https://www.mother.ly/child/ease-your-anxious-child-6-simple-mindfulness-exercises-to-try-today>

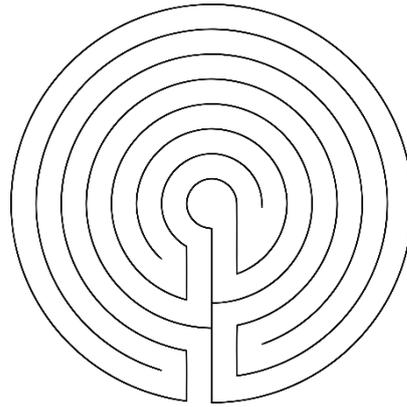
**Activity:** Finger Labyrinths

**Aim:** Acceptance

**Best for:** Children age 8+

**Approximate time:** 10min

**Materials Required:** Labyrinths



### **Instructions:**

1. Ask children to take deep breaths to begin to relax and focus on the entrance to the labyrinth.
2. Ask them to place their pointer finger from their non-dominant hand on the entrance of the labyrinth. If they find it too awkward at first, they can use their dominant hand. However, over time, prompt them to use their non-dominant hand. This helps keep the mind focused on the meditation due to the challenge it presents.
3. Ask them to slowly trace the pattern of the labyrinth with their finger allowing their mind to clear from extra thoughts and focus solely on following the path of the labyrinth.
4. Prompt them to “walk” to the centre of the labyrinth and rest momentarily, taking deep breaths and observing how they are feeling. Reinforce that it’s ok to feel different feelings, even sadness or anger.
5. Give them a minute and ask them to retrace their path out of the labyrinth.
6. Prompt them to sit back, breathe deeply and relax and to observe how they are feeling again.

### **Free Printable Finger Labyrinths:**

- Relax4Life - <http://www.relax4life.com/paperlabyrinths.html>

Adapted from [www.educationsvoice.wordpress.com](http://www.educationsvoice.wordpress.com)

**Activity:** Glitter bottle

**Mindfulness Principle:** Acceptance

**Best for:** Children 5+

**Approximate time:** 10 mins

**Materials Required:** 1 bottle or jar, glitter, glue, water



**Instructions:** Make up glitter bottles with children using as much glitter as you wish. You can even add sequins, shells or pebbles.

<https://www.goodtoknow.co.uk/family/things-to-do/glitter-jars-how-to-calm-down-jar-105300> - how to make your own glitter jar

Once it's done, shake the bottle vigorously then let it settle. Explain that like the glitter in water, when we get caught up in our thoughts and emotions, it can be difficult to see clearly, which impacts our perceptions and decision making. If left unchecked, our thoughts, stress and strong emotions have a tendency to build momentum. Practising mindfulness will help us become aware of this process, create some space between our thoughts, emotions and reactions, and allow ourselves the opportunity to settle.

**Often when something is not right and we take the time to sit and let the mind settle, eventually our mind will become clearer and more still, just like the glitter in the bottles.**

Adapted from 'Wellbeing in the Primary Classroom – A practical guide to teaching happiness' by Adrian Bethune, 2018

**Activity:** Flower breathing

**Aim:** Acceptance

**Best for:** Children 5+

**Approximate time:** 5 minutes

**Materials Required:** None



**Instructions:**

1. Ask children to sit still and quiet and to focus on their breathing. Prompt them to just breathe in through their noses as if they were smelling a flower and out through their mouths pretending to be blowing a leaf.

**Note:**

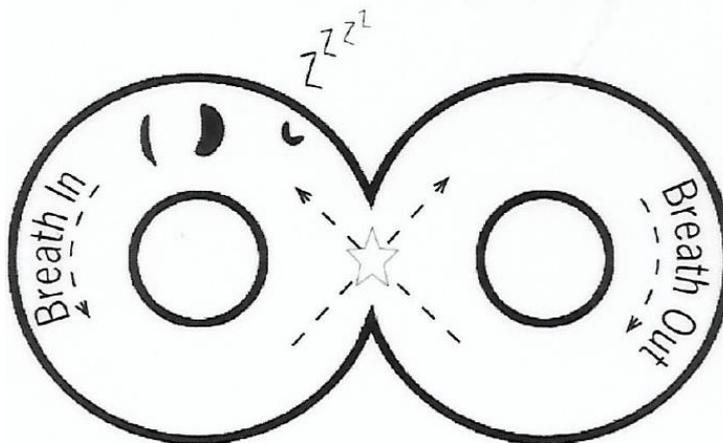
Use music to help children to focus on their breathing. You can find examples of **Tibetan Singing Bowls** on YouTube.

**Star breathing** or the **lazy 8** breathing are other breathing activities you can try. See examples on [www.pinterest.co.uk](http://www.pinterest.co.uk) Also, maximize the use of the **pinwheel breathing** that you'll find on the 1<sup>st</sup> Mindfulness Lesson PowerPoint presentation.



www.EncouragePlay.com © 2015

## Lazy 8 Breathing



**Activity:** Gratitude Jar

**Aim:** Gratitude

**Best for:** Children age 5+

**Approximate time:** 15 minutes

**Materials Required:** Jar, Post-it notes, glitter, etc.



**Instructions:**

1. Sit down together with the kids and discuss the meaning of gratitude.
2. Give examples of things you are grateful for and how you're showing your thanks.
3. Then, if the kids are old enough, ask them to write 1 thing they are grateful for and how they are expressing their thanks, if not, then you can help them with that, or they can draw pictures.
4. When ready, fill a jar with gratitude. Any jar will do ... but you could make the jar really nice by writing on it or adding stickers and glitter.
5. Go through the Post-it with the kids and have a discussion on how many things they all have to be grateful for.
6. You can do this weekly.

**Variations:**

You can choose to pin small gratitude notes on a wall in your classroom.

Adapted from [www.blissfulkids.com](http://www.blissfulkids.com)

**Activity:** Expecto Patronum

**Aim:** Gratitude, inner peace

**Best for:** Children age 10+

**Approximate time:** 5 minutes

**Materials Required:** Room



### **Instructions:**

1. Ask children if they've heard about this defensive charmed used in the Harry Potter books. If they haven't, explain it's a defensive charm used by wizards to protect them against Dementors by summoning one's happiest memories.
2. Ask children to close their eyes and think about a happy memory they have.
3. Prompt them to think about the smells, sounds, textures and/or tastes associated with that memory.
4. Give them 2 or 3 minutes and then ask them to open their eyes and describe how they are feeling.
5. Tell children that this happy memory can be summoned every time they feel sad, afraid or angry.

Adapted from [www.pottermore.com](http://www.pottermore.com)

**Activity:** Journaling

**Aim:** Gratitude

**Best for:** Children age 10+

**Approximate time:** 15 minutes

**Materials Required:** Journal



**Instructions:**

Encourage children to keep a gratitude journal and to every day write one thing they are grateful for.

Adapted from: <https://positivepsychology.com/gratitude-exercises/>

**Activity:** Gratitude letter

**Aim:** Gratitude, inner peace

**Best for:** Children age 10+

**Approximate time:** 15 minutes

**Materials Required:** Pen and paper



**Instructions:**

Encourage children to write a gratitude letter to a friend or relative.

Adapted from: <https://positivepsychology.com/gratitude-exercises/>

**Activity:** Ice-Cube Exercise  
**Mindfulness Principle:** Resilience

**Best for:** Children 8+

**Approximate time:** 10 minutes

**Materials Required:** 1 ice-cube and plastic cup per pupil and teacher



This is a fun and powerful way to demonstrate to pupils how mindfulness can help them when they experience difficult emotions. This then enables them to create more space and freedom, regaining their self-control and helping to develop their resilience.

**Instructions:**

Give each child a cup with an ice-cube inside and explain that we will do the exercise altogether. **The two main rules are that they can put the ice cube back in the cup at any time and they must also put it back in immediately when they are asked.**

When everyone is ready all pupils must put the ice cube in the palm of their hand, paying attention to the sensations on the hand, in the meantime holding the cup underneath to catch any drops. Have a look around the room to see how pupils are reacting and after a short period of time ask them to put the ice back in the cup. Discuss altogether what they noticed.

Now try the exercise again, but this time with a *mindful* attitude. This means paying attention to the breath and really *feeling* the sensations without reacting. You could guide them through this if necessary. Hopefully by doing this, pupils should see that they can hold the ice on their hand for longer. Discuss what they noticed, particularly what was different the second time? Highlight the power of mindfulness here and that although the stimulus was the same, the response was different with a mindful attitude.

Adapted from Youth Mindfulness Kids Programme

**Activity:** 'The places you'll go' by Dr Seuss

**Mindfulness Principle:** Resilience

**Best for:** Children 5+

**Approximate time:** 30 minutes or spread out in time

**Materials Required:** A copy of the book or watch online



**Instructions:**

1. Share the text with the children either using the book or show them an online video. E.g. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3U60jboHHFs>
2. Discuss the key features of the book including the mindfulness aspects of gratitude, kindness to self and others and resilience.
3. Focus on strategies they can develop to help them handle difficult times and stress.

Adapted from Dr Seuss' book 'Oh, The Places You'll Go'



**Activity:** The Stretch Zone

**Mindfulness Principle:** Resilience

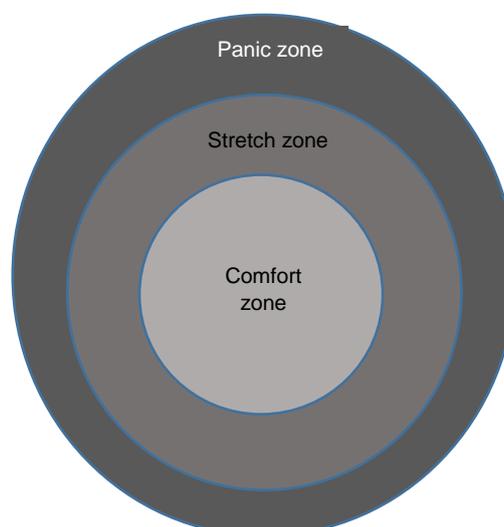
**Best for:** Children 8+

**Approximate time:** 30 mins

**Materials Required:** Internet access/whiteboard, display materials

**Instructions:**

1. Show the video, Meet your brain ([www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p005m333](http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p005m333)) to your class, explaining that our brains are amazing and through effort and practice, our brains form new connections and learn new things. This also introduces the idea of 'neuroplasticity' and teaches them that, like a muscle, we can grow our brains.
2. Ask children to think of the things they are already good at. This can be in school or outside school. **Then ask 2 questions:** 1 – Were you always good at those things? 2 – How did you get good at those things? The children invariably conclude that it was through practising and putting in effort that they improved.
3. Create a stretch zone display in the classroom (see below) with a comfort zone in the middle (with phrases like 'Easy', 'Know it already', 'Boring'), and then a stretch zone outside (with phrases such as 'Make mistakes', 'Tricky', 'Exciting'). You don't have to include a panic zone but it is worth talking about it in relation to the other zones of learning. You can download a 'stretch zone' display banner using this link: [www.teachappy.co.uk/resources-and-downloads](http://www.teachappy.co.uk/resources-and-downloads).



4. Explain that the comfort zone is a place where we know what we're doing. It is a nice place to be, but if we spend too much time there we start to get bored. When they step out of their comfort zone, they enter the stretch zone! Here, they'll encounter more challenging work where they might feel confused and will make mistakes. However, if they really focus in the stretch zone, try their best and don't give up, they start to be able to do work that they couldn't do before.
5. Remind them that their brain grows the most when they work in the stretch zone, as their neurons fire and wire together. The idea is to get the children excited about being in the stretch zone without feeling stressed or overwhelmed.

Adapted from 'Wellbeing in the Primary Classroom – A practical guide to teaching happiness' by Adrian Bethune, 2018

**Activity:** Finding Positivity / Positivity Jar

**Aim:** Resilience

**Best for:** Children 5+

**Approximate time:** 10 minutes

**Materials Required:** None



### **Instructions:**

End each day with a positive thought – Have each child tell the class **one thing they have learned that day** or **what the best part of their day in school was**, before they leave for the day.

As a class, celebrate the successes; clap, cheer, smile and congratulate the positives. These positive thoughts and emotions follow the children out the door and into home.

This gives you, as a teacher, a sense of accomplishment and positive mindful reflection on the day. It allows you to enjoy the success of the day instead of only considering the things that didn't go well. It gives the day balance.

For children, it begins to refocus the day and allows them to bask in the glow of positivity.

### **Variations:**

**Positivity Jar** - where you have positive messages/quotes on Post-It notes in a jar and you give them out to children before they go home on a Friday.

E.g., 'Never stop making wishes,' 'you are braver than you think,' 'always try your best'

Adapted from [www.educationsvoice.wordpress.com](http://www.educationsvoice.wordpress.com)

## Useful links

The following links contain useful information on mindfulness and further activities.

[www.blissfulkids.com](http://www.blissfulkids.com)

[www.educationsvoice.wordpress.com](http://www.educationsvoice.wordpress.com)

[www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/be-mindful-report](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/be-mindful-report)

[www.youthmindfulness.org](http://www.youthmindfulness.org)

The following links will direct practitioners to Apps they might find useful when using a mindfulness based approach in schools.

[www.calm.com](http://www.calm.com)

[www.headspace.com](http://www.headspace.com)

[www.insighttimer.com](http://www.insighttimer.com)

[www.stopbreathethink.com](http://www.stopbreathethink.com)

## Questionnaires

### **Questionnaire for Children**

What 3 things do you remember most about Mindfulness?	1.  2.  3.
Was there anything you would like to learn more about it?	
Was there anything else you wish had been included in the lessons?	
How will what you have learned help you in school and at home?	

### **Questionnaire for Teachers**

Was the content of the resource pack easy to use?	1	2	3	4	5
Did the content of the resource pack meet your expectations?	1	2	3	4	5
Was the content of the resource pack relevant to your pupils' needs?	1	2	3	4	5
How would you rate the quality of the training provided?	1	2	3	4	5
How would you rate the quality of the support provided?	1	2	3	4	5

Would you use the resource pack again?	1	2	3	4	5
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### Questionnaire for Parents

How would you rate the quality of the twilight provided?	1	2	3	4	5
Did you feel able to reinforce some of the mindfulness learning your child was doing in the school at home?	1	2	3	4	5
Have you noticed any changes in your child that you would link with the use of mindfulness based approaches? Please briefly describe the changes. _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	1	2	3	4	5

### References and Further reading

Some of the books referenced here have further mindfulness based activities should practitioners wish to expand this approach beyond what's suggested in this document.

Nurture UK also has a useful resource called 60 Mindful Minutes.

- Altman, D (2011) *One-Minute Mindfulness – 50 simple ways to find Peace, Clarity and New Possibilities in a Stressed-Out World*. New World Library; Original Edition
- Altman, D (2016) *101 Mindful Ways to Build Resilience: Cultivate Calm, Clarity, Optimism and Happiness*. PESI Publishing & Media

- Bethune, A (2018) *Wellbeing in the Primary Classroom: A practical guide to teaching happiness*. Bloomsbury Education
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- Graugaard, G. W. (2016) *The Children's Meditations, In my heart*. Room for Reflection Publishing
- Greenland, S.K. (2016) *Mindful Games: Sharing Mindfulness and Meditation with Children, Teens and Families*. Shambhala Publications Inc.
- Gutman, L.M. & Vorhaus, J (2012) *The Impact of Pupil Behaviour on Educational Outcomes*. Research Report DFE-RR253
- Hanh, T.N. and Weare, K (2017) *Happy teachers change the world: A Guide for Cultivating Mindfulness in Education*. Parallax Press
- Hawkins, K (2017) *Mindful Teacher, Mindful School*. Sage Publications Ltd; First Edition
- Rae, T (2014) *60 Mindful Minutes: Developing mindful behaviour in the nurture group*. The Nurture Group Network
- Sammons, A (2019) *The Compassionate Teacher: Why compassion should be at the heart of our schools*. John Catt Educational Limited
- Siegel, D and Bryson, T (2012) *The Whole-Brain Child: 12 Proven Strategies to Nurture Your Child's Developing Mind*. Robinson, First Edition
- Smiling Mind (2018). *Evidence based guidelines for mindfulness in schools*.
- Snel, E (2014) *Sitting Still Like a Frog: Mindfulness Exercises for Kids (and Their Parents)* Shambhala Publications Inc; Pap/Com edition
- [www.pottermore.com](http://www.pottermore.com)